

## Aluminum plant sued; high levels of fluoride cited

COLUMBIA FALLS, Mont.—The federal government is suing to stop Anaconda's aluminum reduction plant here from emitting fluorides at levels that have allegedly resulted in death and injury to local vegetation and wildlife.

The suit was filed Nov. 3 by the U.S. Attorney General on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior.

The government claims that the plant currently emits more than 4000 pounds of fluoride each day. It charges that trees, plants and wildlife in the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park, located north and east of the plant, have been killed or injured by absorption or ingestion of excess amounts of fluoride. The damage has created the potential for a hazardous forest fire and has decreased the value of the property, according to the suit. The suit also claims that the damage will continue unless fluoride emissions are reduced to 200 pounds per day. Besides a permanent injunction preventing further emissions at current levels, the suit seeks compensation for property damage but specifies no amounts.

Fluorides are emitted from all aluminum reduction plants. Anaconda has been improving emission controls at its 22-year-old plant at Columbia Falls in order to meet the present Montana standard for fluoride emissions of 864 pounds per day. No technology is known that will reduce fluoride emissions to 200 pounds per day.

The plant is currently operating under a variance from the state while it installs new technology that is designed to bring it within the existing state emissions standards. The technology, the first of its kind to be used in the U.S., was purchased from Sumitomo Chemical Co. Ltd., of Osaka, Japan. The program, which includes conversion of the plant to Sumitomo technology, is expected to cost about \$40 million. A major portion of the installation is complete. The entire system will be ready in 1979.

Because adaptation to the Sumitomo technology requires major physical modification of the plant as well as highly disciplined operations, unforeseen problems have arisen. However, these problems have been identified and are being solved in an orderly manner.

Some 1400 people are employed at the plant. About 300 are involved in installing the Sumitomo apparatus that should also reduce energy consumption by 18 percent.